EXTRACTS

FROM THE

TREATISE OF PROCLUS,

ENTITLED

TEN DOUBTS CONCERNING PROVIDENCE.

1. WHETHER Providence extends to all things, to wholes and parts, and as far as to the most indivisible natures in the heavens and in the sublunary regions, in things eternal and things corruptible? This Proclus affirms, and says that every particular, even of the minutest things, depends on the beneficent providence of divinity. For nothing escapes that one whether you speak of the essence of a thing, or its being known. It is said indeed, and is rightly said, that the whole circle is centrally in the centre, since the centre is the cause, but the circle the thing caused, and for the same reason every number is monadically in unity. But in the one of Providence, all things subsist after a more exalted mode, since that is more transcendently one than a centre and the monad.

2. How divinity foreknows and provides for things contingent? Proclus answers, that divinity, on account of his most perfect nature,

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knows in their seeds and causes things indefinite definitely, as he also knows things distant and corporeal, without distance and incorporeally.

3. Whether Providence is the cause of things definite and indefinite according to the same, and after the same manner? Proclus answers that to provide for is nothing else than to benefit; and that hence every thing participates of that one good according to its own measure and order, so that Providence retains its unity and liberty even in things indefinite. In the same chapter also he proves that divinity provides for things contingent and indefinite, that they may not be as it were superadventitious in the universe. For, says he, if the Gods are willing and able to provide definitely for things indefinite, as being the authors of them, they will entirely provide for them, and providing will know the desert of the subjects of their providential energy. And the Gods indeed, with an exempt transcendency, extend their providence to all things, but dæmons dividing their superessential subsistence, receive the guardianship of different herds of animals, distributing the providence of the Gods, as Plato says, as far as to the most ultimate division. Hence some of them preside over men, others over lions, or other animals, and others over plants; and still more partially, some are the inspective guardians of the eye, others of the heart, and others of the liver. All things, however, are full of Gods, some of whom exert their providential energies immediately, but others through dæmons as media; not that the Gods are incapable of being present to all things, but that ultimate are of themselves incapable of participating first natures.

4. How the participations of the Gods are effected, or how the Gods energize providentially on inferior natures? Proclus answers that the participations are according to the aptitude of the participants; viz. they subsist rationally in rational, but intellectually in intellectual natures, and imaginably and sensibly in those beings that live according to imagination and sense. And they subsist essentially and through being alone, in those things which are without life. Hence, Providence being established above all beings, according to divine union itself, and ener-

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gizing according to one energy adapted to *the one*, every thing which accedes to it participates of it according to its natural adaptation. With respect to the failure of the oracles he says, that the energy of divinity remaining always the same, places or men become unadapted to its participation, just as if a certain statue always remaining the same, a mirror should at one time exhibit a fulgid image of it, but at another, an obscure or debile, or indeed no image of it at all. He adds, If, therefore, it should be said that oracles sometimes participate of the Gods who are the sources of divination, but at other times fail, becoming inefficacious, and as it were without spirit, for a certain period, the causes of this irregularity must be referred to the vapours that are the instruments of inspiration failing, through an inability of always being the participants of divine influence. For the oracles are true which give completion to the phænomena, and angels, dæmons and heroes are veracious, which the Gods and the perpetually existing allotments in the universe illuminate, though certain waters and openings of the earth cannot always participate of them, on account of their unstable nature. Or if it should be said, that the powers of sacred rites, sometimes entering into statues, causing them to be vitalized, and filling them with divine inspiration, fail in certain periods of time, the failure of these also, I should think it proper to refer to the recipients, and not to any variation of the energy of the Gods that inspire them. For neither do we dare to accuse the sun as the cause of the eclipse of the moon, but the conical shadow of the earth into which the moon falls.

5. Whence and why evil subsists, since there is Providence? Proclus answers, that there are two kinds of evils, one in bodies, contrary to nature; the other in souls, contrary to reason. The kingdom of Providence, however, says he, is molested by neither of them; but to the former of these evils, the end is good, and the variety and perfection of the universe. For every thing which is preternatural takes place, in order that something which is according to nature may be effected, but not vice versa. And with respect to the latter of these evils, between beings more perfect than we are, and brutes, it is necessary that souls should

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intervene as a medium, which are endued with reason, anger and desire, and rejoice in freedom of will.

6. If Providence is, why are good men oppressed with evil, but bad men triumph? Proclus answers, that notwithstanding this, virtue and the matter of virtue are not wanting to the good; and also, that this praise is peculiar to them, that they had rather cultivate naked Virtue, than Vice with all her abundance. That it is not an evil to be deprived of the incentives to evil; that some have even earnestly desired adverse fortune; and that wise men have always borne it with fortitude. Nor is it expedient that wise men should at one and the same time abound with every kind of good. For it is necessary that they should have a certain experience of the evils of the present life, by which the soul being excited, desires a transition from hence to that place which is beyond the reach of evil. He adds, that many through adversity have arrived at greater attainments in virtue; and that in short, those things only are evil which we ourselves perpetrate, and not those which we suffer [from an external cause]. That all bad men are without glory, and without honour, though they should be surrounded by thousands of flatterers. To the question which he adjoins to this, why Providence distributes equal to unequal things, according to arithmetical, and not according to geometrical equality, as when a whole city perishes, there is a similar destruction of dissimilar men, viz. of the good and the bad, he answers as follows. In the first place, indeed, they do not suffer this similitude of punishment so far as they are dissimilar, but so far as they are similar; in consequence of voluntarily inhabiting the same city, or entering the same ship, and fighting together, or mutually suffering any thing else of the same species; and so according to the energy of that species, they suffer a certain something which is the same. So far, however, as they are better and worse, they participate differently of the common calamity; since the latter perish, bearing it impatiently, but the former enduring it mildly. And after a separation from the present life, the place destined to be the habitation of more excellent beings receives the former, but the abode of subordinate beings receives the latter. Proclus afterwards adds, that

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there is a certain order and a period of common fate, terminating from different principles in the same end, and a concurrence of progressions, where the less principal parts are compelled from necessity to be copassive. And that we are ignorant of the true equalities of souls.

7. If Providence extends as far as to the lowest beings, whence is the great inequality in the allotments of brutes, their mutual devorations, and the like, derived? Proclus answers, that if there is any thing in them of a self-motive nature, the cause of this must be investigated from a higher source; but if they are only corporeal, it is of no consequence if they suffer the same thing as a shadow all-variously transformed, and are subject to Fate.

8. Why punishments do not immediately follow after crimes, but are inflicted at length after the commission of them, and this sometimes is very long after?[1] Proclus answers, that the implanted root of wickedness (just as the earth bearing thorns, though the germes are a thousand times cut off, still produces the like) renders the same energies, in consequence of continuing inflexible by punishment. Providence, therefore, waits for an appropriate time, not such as may be pleasing to the vulgar, but such as it knows will contribute to the health of souls, and instructs many by endurance. For, together with the Gods, says Plato, Fortune and Time govern all things, whether it be requisite that some good should be imparted, or that there should be a purification from something contrary to good. In the next place, vice is a punishment to itself, and the most grievous injury the soul can sustain. Precipitate anger also is not a good dispensator of punishments. Plato once, being about to chastize a slave, was seen holding his hand in an elevated position for some time, and being asked why he did so, said that he was punishing his own impetuous anger. Archytas said to his servants in a field, who had not done what he had ordered them to do, and expected to be punished for their negli-

[1] See Plutarch's admirable treatise, concerning those who are slowly punished by divinity; from which Proclus has derived much in what follows.

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gence, " It is well for you that I am angry." And Theano said to one of her servants, " If I were not angry I would chastize you." Among the Egyptians there was a law, that a pregnant woman who was judged worthy of death, should not be put to death till she was delivered. What wonder, therefore, is it that Providence should for a time spare those who are deserving of death, but are able to perform not trifling, but illustrious actions, till they have accomplished them? If Themistocles had been immediately punished for what he did when he was a young man, who would have delivered Athens from the Persian evils? Who also would have explained the Pythian oracle? If Dionysius had perished in the beginning of his tyranny, who would have freed Sicily, which was thought to be irremediably lost, from the Chalcedonians? If the punishment of Periander had not been deferred for a long time, who would have freed the pleasant island of Leucadia, who would have liberated Anaxorium from its adversaries?—To which may be added, that the time of deferred punishment seems long to our feeble vision, but is nothing to the eye of Providence, just as the place also in which we live, and carry about these bodies is perfectly small for the punishment of great offences; but there are many and indescribable places of punishment in the infernal regions, and excessive torments for the offenders that are there.—On account of the magnitude of the punishment likewise, the whole of it is not inflicted at once. Souls also are naturally adapted to feel remorse, which is the forerunner of their greatest sufferings. For they say that Apollodorus the tyrant saw himself in a dream scourged and boiled by certain persons, and his heart exclaiming from the kettle, I am the cause of these thy torments. But Ptolemy who was surnamed Thunder, thought in a dream that he was called to judgment by Seleucus, and that vultures and wolves sat there as his judges. Such are the preludes to the vicious of impending punishment.

9. How the crimes of other persons, as for instance of parents or potentates are punished in children and subjects? For that certain persons are said to have suffered punishment for the crimes of their ancestors, both revelations and the mysteries manifest, and certain liber-

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ating Gods are said to purify from them. Proclus answers, that a nation, or a family, or a city, must be considered as one body, and that these have kindred powers that preside over them, so that such crimes are not foreign, on account of this conjunction and similitude. Why, therefore, should it be any longer paradoxical, that souls when transferred into other bodies, should suffer punishment for the crimes which they have committed in former bodies?

10. Since the providence of divinity knows all things and reduces them to good, how are angels and demons, and if you are also willing, heroes and souls that govern the world in conjunction with the Gods, said to exert a providential energy? Proclus answers, that divinity provides for *all things* universally and totally, but the other powers partially, subordinately, and for *certain things* only.

In order to supply as much as possible the loss of the entire treatise of Proclus on this subject, the following admirable observations on Providence, are added, translated from his Commentary On the Parmenides of Plato; a work, which to the disgrace of Europe, is still only extant in manuscript.

" The Athenian guest in the Laws clearly evinces that there is a providence, where his discourse shows that the Gods know, and possess a power which governs, all things. But Parmenides, at the very beginning of the discussion concerning Providence, evinces the absurdity of doubting divine knowledge and dominion. For to assert that the conclusion of this doubt is still *more dire* than the former [i. e. that divinity is not known by us] sufficiently shows that he rejects the arguments which subvert providence. For it is dire to say that divinity is not known by us who are rational and intellectual natures, and who essentially possess something divine; but it is still more dire to deprive divine natures of knowledge; since the former pertains to those who do not convert themselves to divinity, but the latter to those who impede the all-pervading goodness of the Gods. And the former pertains to those who err respecting our essence, but the latter to those who convert themselves erroneously about a divine cause. But the expression *still more dire* (δεινοτερον) is not

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used as signifying a more strenuous doubt, in the same manner as we are accustomed to call those *dire* (δεινοι) who vanquish by the power of language, but as a thing worthy of greater dread and caution to the intelligent. For it divulses the union of things, and dissociates divinity apart from the world. It also defines divine power as not pervading to all things, and circumscribes intellectual knowledge as not all-perfect. It likewise subverts all the fabrication of the universe, the order imparted to the world from separate causes, and the goodness which fills all things from one will, in a manner adapted to the nature of unity. Nor less dire than any one of these is the confusion of piety. For what communion is there between Gods and men, if the former are deprived of the knowledge of our concerns? All supplications, therefore, of divinity, all sacred institutions, all oaths adducing the Gods as a witness, and the untaught conceptions implanted in our souls concerning divinity, will perish. What gift also will be left of the Gods to men, if they do not previously comprehend in themselves the desert of the recipients, if they do not possess a knowledge of all that we do, of all we suffer, and of all that we think, though we do not carry it into effect? With great propriety, therefore, are such assertions called dire. For if it is unholy to change any legitimately divine institutions, how can such an innovation as this be unattended with dread? But that Plato rejects this hypothesis which makes divinity to be ignorant of our concerns, is evident from these things, since it is one of his dogmas, that divinity knows and produces all things. Since, however, some of those posterior to him have vehemently endeavoured to subvert such-like assertions, let us speak concerning them as much as may be sufficient for our present purpose.

Some of those then posterior to Plato, on seeing the unstable condition of sublunary things, were fearful that they were not under the direction of Providence and a divine nature; for such events as are said to take place through fortune, the apparent inequality respecting lives, and the disordered motion of material natures, induced them greatly to suspect that they were not under the government of Providence. Besides, the persuasion that Divinity is not busily employed in the evolution of all-various reasons, and that he does not depart from his own blessedness,

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induced them to frame an hypothesis so lawless and dire. For they were of opinion that the passion of our soul and the perturbation which it sustains by descending to the government of bodies, must happen to divinity, if he converted himself to the providential inspection of things. Farther still, from considering that different objects of knowledge are known by different gnostic powers; as for instance, sensibles by sense, objects of opinion by opinion, things scientific by science, and intelligibles by intellect; and, at the same time, neither placing sense, nor opinion, nor science in divinity, but only an intellect immaterial and pure;—hence they asserted that divinity had no knowledge of any other things, than the objects of intellect. [And this was the opinion of the more early Peripatetics.] For say they, if matter is external to him, it is necessary that he should be pure from apprehensions which are converted to matter; but being purified from these, it follows that he must have no knowledge of material natures. Hence the patrons of this doctrine deprived him of a knowledge of, and providential exertions about sensibles; not through any imbecility of nature, but through a transcendency of gnostic energy; just as those whose eyes are filled with light, are said to be incapable of perceiving mundane objects, at the same time that this incapacity is nothing more than transcendency of vision. They likewise add, that there are many things which it is beautiful not to know. Thus to the entheastic, (or those who are divinely inspired) it is beautiful to be ignorant of whatever would destroy the deific energy; and to the scientific, not to know that which would defile the indubitable perception of science.

But others [as the Stoics], ascribe indeed to divinity a knowledge of sensibles, in order that they may not take away his providence, but at the same time convert his apprehension to that which is external, represent him as pervading through the whole of a sensible nature, as passing into contact with the objects of his government, impelling every thing, and being locally present with all things; for say they, he would not otherwise be able to extend a providential energy in a becoming manner, and impart good to every thing according to its desert.

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Others again affirm that divinity has a knowledge of himself, but that he has no occasion to understand sensibles in order to provide for them, since by his very essence he produced all things, and adorns whatever he has produced, without having any knowledge of his productions. They add, that this is by no means wonderful, since nature operates without knowledge, and unattended with phantasy; but that divinity differs from nature in this, that he has a knowledge of himself, though not of the things which are fabricated by him. And such are the assertions of those who were persuaded that divinity is not separated from mundane natures, and of those who deprived him of the knowledge of inferior concerns, and of a knowledge operating in union with providence.

With respect to these philosophers, we say, that they speak truly, and yet not truly, on this subject. For if providence has a subsistence, neither can there be any thing disordered, nor can divinity be busily employed, nor can he know sensibles through passive sense: but these philosophers in consequence of not knowing the exempt power and uniform knowledge of divinity, appear to deviate from the truth. For thus we interrogate them: does not every thing energize in a becoming manner when it energizes according to its own power and nature? as for instance, does not nature, in conformity to the order of its essence, energize physically, intellect intellectually, and soul psychically, or according to the nature of soul? And when the same thing is generated by many and different causes, does not each of these produce according to its own power, and not according to the nature of the thing produced? Or shall we say, that each produces after the same manner, and that, for example, the sun and man generate man, according to the same mode of operation, and not according to the natural ability of each, viz. the one partially, imperfectly, and with a busy energy, but the other without anxious attention, by its very essence, and totally? But to assert this would be absurd; for a divine operates in a manner very different from a mortal nature.

If therefore, every thing which energizes, energizes according to its own nature and order, some things divinely and supernaturally, others naturally, and others in a different manner, it is evident that every gnostic being knows

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according to its own nature, and that it does not follow that because the thing known is one and the same, on this account, the natures which know, energize in conformity to the essence of the things known. Thus sense, opinion and our intellect, know that which is white, but not in the same manner: for sense cannot know what the essence is of a thing white, nor can opinion obtain a knowledge of its proper objects in the same manner as intellect; since opinion knows only *that* a thing is, but intellect knows the cause of its existence. *Knowledge therefore subsists according to the nature of that which knows, and not according to the nature of that which is known.* What wonder is it then that Divinity should know all things in such a manner as is accommodated to his nature, viz. divisible things indivisibly, things multiplied, uniformly, things generated, according to an eternal intelligence, totally, such things as are partial; and that with a knowledge of this kind, he should possess a power productive of all things, or, in other words, that by knowing all things with simple and united intellections, he should impart to every thing being, and a progression into being? For the auditory sense knows audibles in a manner different from the common sense; and prior to, and different from these, reason knows audibles, together with other particulars which sense is not able to apprehend. And again, of desire which tends to one thing, of anger which aspires after another thing, and of *proairesis*, or deliberate choice, there is one particular life moving the soul towards all these, which are mutually motive of each other. It is through this life that we say, I desire, I am angry, and I deliberately choose this thing or that; for this life verges to all these powers, and lives in conjunction with them, as being a power which is impelled to every object of desire. But prior both to reason and this one life, is *the one* of the soul, which often says, I perceive, I reason, I desire, and I deliberate, which follows all these energies and energizes together with them. For we should not be able to know all these, and to apprehend in what they differ from each other, unless we contained a certain indivisible nature, which has a subsistence above the common sense, and which prior to opinion, desire and will, knows all that these know and desire, according to an indivisible mode of apprehension.

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If this be the case, it is by no means proper to disbelieve in the indivisible knowledge of divinity, which knows sensibles without possessing sense, and divisible natures without possessing a divisible energy, and which without being present to things in place, knows them prior to all local presence, and imparts to every thing that which every thing is capable of receiving. The unstable essence therefore, of apparent natures is not known by him in an unstable, but in a definite manner; nor does he know that which is subject to all-various mutations dubiously, but in a manner perpetually the same; for by knowing himself, he knows every thing of which he is the cause, possessing a knowledge transcendently more accurate than that which is co-ordinate to the objects of knowledge; since a causal knowledge of every thing is superior to every other kind of knowledge. Divinity therefore, knows without busily attending to the objects of his intellection, because he abides in himself, and by alone knowing himself, knows all things. Nor is he indigent of sense, or opinion, or science, in order to know sensible natures: for it is himself that produces all these, and that in the unfathomable depths of the intellection of himself, comprehends an united knowledge of them, according to cause, and in one simplicity of perception. Just as if some one having built a ship, should place in it men of his own formation, and, in consequence of possessing a various art, should add a sea to the ship, produce certain winds, and afterwards launch the ship into the new created main. Let us suppose too, that he causes these to have an existence by merely conceiving them to exist, so that by imagining all this to take place, he gives an external subsistence to his inward phantasms, it is evident that in this case he will contain the cause of every thing which happens to the ship through the winds on the sea, and that by contemplating his own conceptions, without being indigent of outward conversion, he will at the same time both fabricate and know these external particulars. Thus, and in a far greater degree, that divine intellect the artificer of the universe, possessing the causes of things, both gives subsistence to, and contemplates, whatever the universe contains without departing from the speculation of himself. But if with respect to intellect one kind is more partial, and another more total, it is evident

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that there is not the same intellectual perfection of all things, but that where intelligibles have a total and undistributed subsistence, there the knowledge is more total and indivisible, and where the number of forms proceeds into multitude and extension, there the knowledge is both one and multiform. Hence, this being admitted, we cannot wonder on hearing the Orphic verses, in which the theologist says:

Αυτη δε Ζηνος και εν ομμασι πατρος ανακτος
Ναιουσ' αθανατοι τε θεοι, θνητοι τ' ανθρωποι,
Οσσα τε ην γεγαωσα, και υστερον οσσα εμελλον.

i. e.

There in the sight of Jove, the parent king,
Th' immortal gods and mortal men reside,
With all that ever was, and shall hereafter be.

For the artificer of the universe is full of intelligibles, and possesses the causes of all things separated from each other; so that he generates men, and all other things, according to their characteristic peculiarities, and not so far as each is divine, in the same manner as the divinity prior to him, the intelligible father Phanes."

The admirable dogma in this most beautiful extract, "that knowledge subsists according to the nature of that which knows, and not according to the nature of that which is known," was originally derived from Iamblichus, as is evident from the commentary of Ammonius on Aristotle's treatise On Interpretation. (See note to p. 162 of my translation of the Organon.) Boethius in the 5th book of his treatise De Consolatione, elegantly illustrates this dogma. The passage I allude to begins with the words: "Omne enim quod cognoscitur, non secundum sui vim, sed secundum cognoscentium potius comprehenditur facultatem." The sources however from whence he derived this doctrine, appear to have been unknown to all his editors and commentators; for they are not noticed by any of them.

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